

Thinking Redeployment

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I just wanted to take a minute and discuss redeployment and what we can do to make it successful. Our unit, 1-10th Aviation, just returned from an 11-month tour in Iraq. The tour went well. Our commander was very receptive to my concerns as the unit's aviation safety officer and the recommended corrections throughout the tour. As we got to the six- to eight-month mark, we started working on a redeployment plan.

As anyone who has read the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center's preliminary loss reports knows, we are losing many Soldiers to the "getting-home phase." I would like to pass along our plan to generate a discussion and perhaps stimulate thought.

First, we actually did have a safety stand-down day in a combat zone in a hostile city. For this we needed the support of the ground brigade commander, a little help from a sister unit and our own command support. We executed the safety stand-down with 95 percent attendance, with the 5 percent who were on quick-reaction force making up the training later. Classes were focused on accident review during our deployment and lessons learned, a reminder that many accidents happen at the end of the rotation. A few classes also focused on what lies in wait for us when we finally get home. I used many of the videos from the USACRC Web site (again, great job by the USACRC), but the one that had the most impact was the family video "Living Without Josh."

Second, during the redeployment briefs, my brief became required. It was interesting to note that briefs like finance, health assessment and others were documented, tracked and checked off. However, you had to dig deep to find the requirements to have a safety brief focusing on redeployment, especially given the amount of redeployment-related deaths and injuries. Again, support and direction from our command made the brief mandatory. I gave a second brief to all Soldiers in conjunction with the rest of the redeployment briefs. This brief focused on the hazards upon returning home. Again, the USACRC videos were a staple, along with segments from the U.S. Automobile Association driving class series. USAA sent me the training package in Iraq for free, along with drunk-and-distracted driving goggles.

Third, all Soldiers, as they arrived at home station (while their bags were being off loaded and customs had the dogs on them), got another prepared oral brief from their chalk leader. Each chalk leader was briefed by the task force commander as to his intent and expectations. This brief reinforced all the briefs we'd conducted in the first two phases. It also included some topics covered by other sections such as reunion issues. At this time, all Soldiers were given a taxi card and key phone numbers. Phone numbers are very important, as the unit has become reliant on each other and could, at any time, just knock on someone's door. Most phones were turned off during the deployment. Having a phone plan and a receptive rear detachment was important for all issues from basic to emergency.

Having a lodgment plan for geographical bachelors and single Soldiers was also important. Providing basic housing for a limited time reduces problems significantly. A unit van was available for Soldiers to get to the PX, places to get food and other needs. Access to privately owned vehicles in storage was made available the next day and was part of the seven-day process. The first two days allowed Soldiers time to sleep off the jet lag, get to know their families once again and refamiliarize

themselves with the local area. These two days also allowed Soldiers to have their vehicles inspected by a mechanic and registered on post. No vehicle left storage if it failed a POV inspection. Soldiers were told well in advance of leaving country that this was a requirement and to check their license, registration and inspection data.

Finally, we conducted a seven-day reverse soldier readiness checks process. It seems painful and stupid (trust me, I heard it plenty), but it allows Soldiers to ease into garrison and family life and still have contact with the people they just spent a year with. We had a basic half-day schedule doing the out-processing-type stuff, and then the rest of the day was for the Soldiers. This also helps single Soldiers because their buddies are still there to assist with rides and getting things fixed.

The last day of the SRC, the chalk leaders of all flights sat down with each Soldier and reviewed their ASMIS-2 printout (done on the third day of R-SRC with computers provided by rear detachment), discussed their plans for travel and return and reviewed each Soldier's contract. The contract was a discussion of the trends within the Army for incidents between the leader and the Soldier. A few leaders didn't like this, but it was one last chance to interface with the Soldier before sending him or her on leave for 30 days.

I'm not sure if this process is appealing to everyone, and not all Soldiers need these briefs. But, I will say all our Soldiers are back from block leave (with a few exceptions to those who had extended leave) with no incidents and no DUIs.